

THE NARRATIVE VOICE IN APULEIUS' *METAMORPHOSES*

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While few critics today would follow St. Augustine in his famous assumption that author and narrator of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* are identical, it has not yet been systematically shown in what way Apuleius limits his narrator's perspective and how such limitations affect the character of the work in general. Such a demonstration must take into account the psychology of the narrator, Lucius, and how his personality may be related to his role as narrator. While I do not propose here to treat in detail the entire problem of the relationship between the narrative *persona* and the story, I hope that some of my conclusions may encourage the setting up of new guidelines in critical approaches to Apuleius' narrative method as a whole. We will start with an analysis of the narrative voice in the cryptic "prologue" to the first book of the novel, in which the narrator introduces himself to the reader and makes certain claims about the nature of the forthcoming work. Critics who discuss this prologue have tended to emphasize its vagueness, the apparent inadequacy of its information, and its bombastic language; some have dismissed it as a joke intended to amuse by the absurdity of its claims, or, less charitably, have taken it as evidence for Apuleius' proletarian literary tastes.¹ I wish to argue that the prologue does in fact make definite hints about the complex nature of the ensuing narrative, but that it does so in a playful, allusive manner which owes something to the prologues of Plautus. In the second section, I will

¹ For a sample of such views, see C. Bürger, *Hermes* 23 (1888) 492; B. E. Perry, *TAPA* 57 (1926) 259; P. G. Walsh, *The Roman Novel* (Cambridge 1970) 142; H. Ebel, *Arethusa* 3 (1970) 61. More reliable analyses of the prologue are those of F. Calonghi, *Rivista di Filologia* 43 (1915) 1-33, 209-236, and P. Vallette, *Apulée: Les Métamorphoses* (Paris 1965) Vol. 1 introd. xii-xv.

show how the prologue anticipates subsequent explicit comments made by the narrator about specific *fabulae* to which he introduces the reader. Finally, we will consider how the narrative point of view is transformed in the closing book of the novel.

I. THE PROLOGUE

The prologue begins as follows:

At ego tibi sermone isto Milesio varias fabulas conseram auresque tuas benivolas lepido susurro permulceam, modo si papyrus Aegyptiam argutia Nilotici calami inscriptam non spreveris inspicere, figuras fortunasque hominum in alias imagines conversas et in se rursum mutuo nexu reflectas ut mireris.²

In this sentence the narrator promises to delight the receptive listener with various *fabulae* told in "a Milesian manner of speech" (*Milesio sermone*), but adds the hope that the reader will not be "put off" (*modo si . . . non spreveris inspicere*) at reading "an Egyptian papyrus written with the *argutia* ("cleverness," or better, "sharp point" in a double sense) of a reed from the Nile. There are two major things to observe about this part of the sentence. First, the author implies a distinction between an oral narrative (*fabulae* which will "delight the ear") and a written one (the papyrus inscribed by the Nile reed). Second, these two parts (or aspects?) of the novel will be likely to cause opposite reactions in the reader: he is sure to be delighted by the first, but he may be put off by the second. Both parts of the novel, the narrator goes on, will be based on the theme of the magical metamorphoses of the "figures and fortunes of men into other shapes."

It seems unavoidable to conclude that in this sentence Apuleius refers, however imprecisely, both to a light-hearted and to a more serious aspect of his novel. The "Milesian" aspect would include racy tales such as those for which Aristides and Sisenna were known³ (in *Met.* 4.32 even "The Cupid and Psyche Tale" seems to be called Milesian, but the claim is made suspect by its context in a joke), whereas the

² The text of the *Metamorphoses* cited throughout is the Teubner edition of R. Helm (1965). In the passage here quoted I have substituted commas for Helm's dashes before *modo* and after *inspicere*.

³ For discussions of this literary sub-genre see B. E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances* (Cambridge 1967) 90-95; P. G. Walsh (above, note 1) 10-18.

"Egyptian" aspect, whatever its exact nature, might be expected to inculcate religious or philosophical edification, with which the Egyptians were closely associated.⁴ Note that the unexpected word *argutia*, "sharpness," is used here partly for the sake of contrast with the soft "whispering" (*susurrus*) of the Milesian tales.

We will later consider some further implications of the contrast which is posited in this opening sentence. First note, however, that by drawing an apparent distinction between lighter and more serious aspects of his comic novel, Apuleius is following a not uncommon practice of ancient writers of light fiction. Closely parallel is Lucian's introduction to his *True History*, where he tells the reader that he will offer him various diverting fictitious stories, but also urges him to be on the lookout for something more worthy of serious contemplation (*θεωρίαν οὐκ ἄμουσον ἐπιδείξεται*).⁵ Other parallels can be drawn from Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* and from Varro's *Menippeae*.⁶ Apuleius' opening sentence differs from the comments of these other writers, however, by his turgid and allusive language—an allusiveness which continues throughout his prologue. In the next sentence, the narrator promises to begin his story at once (*exordior*) but pauses to answer a supposed demand by the reader for a personal introduction (*Quis ille?*). "Here is a short answer for you!" replies the narrator enthusiastically, but instead he launches into a wordy and high-flown Greek geography lesson: "The Attic Mt. Hymettus, the Isthmus of Corinth" (called by its less common name, "Ephyra"), "and the Spartan [town of] Taenarus—lucky realms, which are immortally described in books luckier than this one—are where my family comes from." He means to say, of course, "I am from Greece;" but does so by using vague circumlocutions for three of its principal cities: Athens, Corinth, and Sparta.⁷ The vagueness of the phrases, and their failure to convey the expected information adequately, are used comically in

⁴ Cf. *Met.* 11.5; *Asclepius* 24; *Florida* 15 (page 21.16–20 Helm); Heliodorus, *Aethiopica* 3.16.4.

⁵ *True History* 2. Walsh (above, note 1) 3–4 misleadingly describes this dichotomy in Lucian's introduction as one between content ("trivial and escapist") and style ("elegant and bookish").

⁶ *Daphnis and Chloe*, *prooimion* 2; cf. H. H. O. Chalk, *JHS* 80 (1960) 32; Varro, *Inglorius* (*περὶ φθόνου*), frag. 218 in Bücheler, where the contrast is between *voluptas* and *litteras*.

⁷ For a similar circumlocution, cf. Petronius 6.1; Walsh (above, note 1) 86.

a manner recalling Plautus. The Plautine *prologus* is apt to tease his audience by promising to dispatch his *argumentum* in a few words, and then disappointing their expectations by drawing out his prefatory remarks or telling a joke. The parallel with the *Menaechmi* is especially close:

Nunc argumentum accipite atque animum advortite:
 Quam potero in verba conferam paucissima.
 Atque hoc poetae faciunt in comoedis:
 Omnis res gestas esse Athenis autumant,
 Quo illud vobis graecum videatur magis;
 Ego nusquam dicam nisi ubi factum dicitur.⁸

Now here's the plot, pay close attention:
 I'll set it forth as briefly as I can.
 Now here's what authors do in every comic play:
 "It all takes place in Athens, folks," is what they say.
 So this way everything will seem *more Greek* to you.
 But I reveal the true locations when I speak to you.⁹

Like the buffoon showman who introduces a play of Plautus, Apuleius' narrator appears to be laughing with his audience at the dramatic convention he is forced to observe; and he at once goes on in the same light vein to hint that he makes no claims for the lasting literary value of his efforts, nor does he claim any genius for himself:

There [in Greece] I gained [knowledge of] the Attic tongue [as a reward] for the first service of boyhood [presumably this means, "in my studies at school"]. Soon thereafter, in the city of Latium [Rome], a stranger to Roman studies, I approached the native language and learned it after hard work with no teacher to guide me. And by the way, I ask your pardon if I give any offense as an unaccustomed speaker of a foreign and alien language.

This vague "autobiography" cannot be related precisely either to the experiences of the narrator, Lucius, in the remainder of the *Metamorphoses* or to known experiences in the life of Apuleius himself. Lucius, it is true, is Greek; more precisely, he is from Corinth, which we are not told in the prologue and learn later only indirectly (Books 1.22, 2.12); he does make a journey from Greece to Rome (Book 11.26),

⁸ *Men.* 5-10. Cf. *Captivi* 1-2, *Poenulus* 46 ff.

⁹ The translation of the last four lines is from Erich Segal, *Roman Laughter* (Cambridge, Mass. 1968) 36-37.

but under circumstances which seem hardly reconcilable with the above reference. In any case the statement of the prologue is deliberately absurd; it conjures up the disarming, but somehow ludicrous, picture of a Greek boy bent over his books in school laboring to learn his own native language, followed by an equally arduous stint in Rome (this time with no help from a teacher) in which he struggles with only partial success to learn Latin. It is clear that Apuleius, who was proud of his skill in both Greek and Latin,¹⁰ could not be seriously apologizing for a crude or unrefined style in his own novel. But if the statement about the narrator's background is worthless as a piece of biographical information, it may at least make a legitimate literary point: Apuleius wishes to emphasize that the forthcoming story has been adapted from a Greek original, and his statement perhaps hints that the reader can expect plenty of typical Greek raciness in it. Likewise, in the *Florida*, when Apuleius is about to start a story in Latin, having previously spoken in Greek, he uses a geographical term: . . . *satis oratio nostra atticissaverit. Tempus est in Latium demigrare de Graecia*.¹¹ (We may also compare the opening sentence of the prologue, where the novel is said to be set on two "fronts," Miletus and Egypt.) The novel is shown to have had a Greek genesis but to have put on a Roman dress, namely its present form in Latin. It may be argued that Apuleius chooses a cumbersome method to convey a bit of simple information, but this is to miss the spirit of buffoonery. The comic parallel is again to be sought in Plautus, who always refers to the Romans as *barbari* and who pretends to excuse immoral conduct on the grounds that his plays are set in Greece.¹² In Apuleius, the narrator ironically groans over the back-breaking work of translating into a "foreign tongue" and begs to be excused in advance for inadvertent solecisms. His claims, when taken literally, are a comic sham (just as are Plautus' excuses about the setting of his plays), and yet his disarming modesty, though tinged with irony, wins our sympathy both here and many times later when he addresses the reader.

The meaning of the next sentence in the prologue has been much disputed: *Iam haec equidem ipsa vocis immutatio desultoriae scientiae stilo*

¹⁰ *Apologia* 38 (pages 43.19–44.1 Helm); *Florida* 18 (page 38.16–26 Helm).

¹¹ Printed as preface to *De Deo Socratis* (5.6–7 Thomas); cf. Plautus, *Men.* 11–12, 49, 56.

¹² E.g. *Stichus* 446–48; other examples and discussion in Segal (above, note 9) 31–38.

quem accessimus respondet. "This very change of language" must mean "this use of the Latin language to translate a Greek story." This "change" is said to correspond to the style which we have undertaken of a *desultoria scientia*. Scholars have been divided on the interpretation of the italicised words, which seem to mean "a knowledge which jumps from one horse to the next;" does the phrase refer to the metamorphosis produced by witchcraft, in which the bodies of men are miraculously changed into different shapes?¹³ Or could it refer to the variety of the Milesian tales (cf. *varias fabulas conseram*), which quickly move from one subject to the next?¹⁴ The first of these theories can be dismissed, I think, on the grounds that, while metamorphosis is a subject frequently treated in the novel, it cannot be equated with a style of composition. The second theory is more plausible, but still difficult; I cannot see any obvious close correspondence between a transition from Greece to Rome (or from the Greek to the Latin language), on the one hand, and the telling of widely varied tales on the other. In order for the second member of the comparison to correspond to the first, it must be based on a *single* transition of some sort. Now Apuleius several times in the *Metamorphoses* and elsewhere uses the word *stilus* in the sense of a method of composition—specifically, a method employed by authors talented enough to write serious literature, as opposed to the purely narrative talent of an oral storyteller (a *fabulator*), whose tales may be stylistically crude. Speakers in the novel twice attribute *stilus* only to men who are "better educated" (*doctiores*) than they—men, that is, who are fortunate enough to be able to compose written *historiae*, as opposed to oral *fabulae*.¹⁵ We now recall the distinction which the first sentence of the prologue makes between two aspects of the forthcoming book: the Milesian tales, which are, strictly speaking, stories told *orally*; ¹⁶ and the "Egyptian papyrus,"

¹³ As argued by Hildebrand, *Apulei Opera Omnia* (Leipzig 1842) 1.12; M. Molt, *Ad . . . Metamorphoseon Librum Primum Commentarius . . .* (Groningae 1938) 29.

¹⁴ Cf. F. Leo, *Hermes* 40 (1905) 605; Calonghi (above, note 1) 23.

¹⁵ 6.29.7; 8.1.11; cf. *Florida* 9 (page 13.23 Helm). The reference in 2.12 to "*historiam magnam et incredundam fabulam et libros*" would seem, like the statement in the prologue, to be a hint at the bipartite style of the *Metamorphoses*. But the distinction between *fabula* and *historia* is not one which Apuleius attempts to press everywhere, as witnessed by the reference (at the end of the prologue) to the novel as a *fabula Graecanica*.

¹⁶ It is helpful here to remember Lucian's description of Aristides *listening* with delight to the recitation of Milesian tales (*Amores* 1).

which will not produce the same delighted reaction as the tales but may fall in a genre closer to serious literature. Although this distinction is vague, it is the closest which the narrator comes in the prologue to a specific explanation of his narrative method, and it must be this explanation to which he refers at the close of the prologue. Now in order for *desultoriae scientiae stilus* to "correspond" to *immutatio vocis*, it must refer to "a literary method which is based on a (single) jump from one (area of) knowledge to another," in the same way that the narrator himself has made the transition from Greek to Latin. The phrase must refer, then, to the narrator's *two kinds of narrative ability* which have resulted in a single composition: first, the ability to invent oral, entertaining *fabulae* told in the Milesian manner; second, the ability to compose polished literature which is worthy of being written down (*papyrus . . . inscriptam*): specifically, literature which deals with an Egyptian, and therefore possibly religious, motif. Metaphorically the phrase *desultoria scientia* recalls the geographical jump which the novel will make from Miletus to Egypt, corresponding to the move which the narrator himself claims to have made from Greece to Rome. Furthermore, the anticipated reaction of the reader to each of these "jumps" is parallel: just as he may be "put off" (*modo si . . . non spreveris inspicere*) by the "Egyptian" aspect of the book, he may also be "offended" (*siquid . . . offendero*) by the narrator's inexperience in the Latin language.

At the end of the prologue, the narrator allows a veil to fall over whatever distinctions and contrasts he has made in regard to his novel, as he issues a summons to the reader to have a good time:

Fabulam Graecanicam incipimus. Lector intende: laetaberis.

We begin a tale told in the Greek manner. Pay close attention, reader; you will be delighted!

This wording again recalls the opening of a comic play. Compare Plautus' *Asinaria*:

Inest lepos ludusque in hac comoedia:

Ridicula res est. Date benigne operam mihi . . .¹⁷

Be so kind as to pay attention to me, and you'll find
that this comedy contains a lot of wit and fun; the plot is side-splitting.

¹⁷ *Asin.* 13-14.

Thus, to round out his introduction the narrator ceases to attempt any meaningful explication of the novel; he echoes his opening words as he acts as pitchman summoning an audience to attention, a role which he is to repeat several times later. Like the Plautine *prologus* he drums up interest in the story, makes a pointed reference to its exotic origin, and promises a reward to those who listen carefully.

II. THE ASS AND THE GENTLE READER

It is perhaps significant that the prologue to the *Metamorphoses* closes with a warning to pay close attention. For Apuleius' narrator does not simply step off the stage after his opening words, allowing the reader to view and judge the subsequent action for himself; he will be there both to present and to interpret all of the remainder of the novel for us, not as an omniscient author but rather as an actor in his own story, with a viewpoint which is almost always strictly limited to what he can see at the moment. In this respect, Apuleius may have modelled his comic narrator in part on Encolpius, the narrator of Petronius' *Satyricon*: the readers of both Latin novels confront each new bizarre twist in plot with none but the narrator's own hasty reaction to them as a guide.¹⁸ However Encolpius, for all his mistakes, is at least a somewhat more reliable guide than is Lucius: we laugh at him when, in dining with Trimalchio, he emulates what he takes to be the *urbanitas* of his host,¹⁹ but his taste on purely literary matters is generally sound and probably coincides with that of Petronius himself. For example, he is disgusted when listening to a farcical rendering of Vergil, and he offers a heartfelt plea for a return to the simplicity of the classics as literary models.²⁰ Moreover Encolpius, at least in the surviving portions of the *Satyricon*, never steps out of character to address the reader directly (in contrast with Lucius' confidential asides: see below); nor does he offer his own views about such creative efforts as the Matron of Ephesus Tale (111-12)

¹⁸ Two examples from Petronius: *Sat.* 7 (Encolpius' belief that the old bawd is a witch); *Sat.* 19 (his terror at Quartilla's incomprehensible merriment).

¹⁹ *Sat.* 41; cf. J. P. Sullivan, *The "Satyricon" of Petronius* (Bloomington 1968) 158-59.

²⁰ *Sat.* 68 and 1-2; see Sullivan (above, note 19) 163-64. Walsh (above, note 1) argues, 84-85, that even the latter passage, while it "may well represent Petronius' own judgment," humorously contradicts its own message through its overwritten style.

or Eumolpus' poem on the Civil War (119-24). Apuleius rarely allows his own stories to pass without comment; his narrator often plays the role of salesman for the varied fare of the *Metamorphoses*, either alerting the reader ahead of time that an exciting tale is forthcoming (9.4; 9.13-14; 10.2) or applauding such a tale at its conclusion (1.20; 6.25). He passes judgment on people as well as tales, but usually finds that his first impressions of his acquaintances have to be revised. For example, in Hypata Lucius develops a real, if misguided, affection for Milo's servant-girl Fotis (3.19), but after Fotis accidentally causes him to be changed into an ass he decides that she is "the most worthless and evil of women" (3.26). Later, Lucius is prepared to damn the whole female sex when he is outraged at the supposed promiscuity of the captive maiden Charite (7.10), until he discovers that the robber who has proposed selling her into prostitution is actually her husband Tlepolemus in disguise (7.12). Far from promiscuous, Charite emerges as one of the few wives in the novel whose virtue cannot be bought.

If Lucius' judgment about people and events is suspect, it naturally follows that we cannot always believe his analyses of the *fabulae* to which he introduces the reader. In fact in the bulk of the novel the narrative *persona* largely speaks without even the sporadic subtleties it evidences in the prologue, retaining only the prologue's efforts to impress the reader and in large part dropping its efforts to inform him. Lucius the ass cannot invent tales for his acquaintances to hear, nor would such invention match his role as a mere observer of the world through which he travels. Instead he is a recorder and categorizer of material passed on by others. The shallowness and superficiality of his understanding of this material recalls that of Dionysus in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, and prefigures the naiveté of Chaucer the pilgrim in the *Canterbury Tales*, who ironically is given the worst literary taste of all his comrades and recites the travesty "Sir Thopas," his one "original" poem, to prove it. The sweeping categories in which Lucius glibly places most of the tales are at best less than helpful in guiding the reader's reaction to them. For example, Lucius sums up "The Cupid and Psyche Tale," one of the richest and most complex sections of the *Metamorphoses*, by calling it a mere "pretty little story," a view which is obviously not to be taken as Apuleius' own final word on this major

section of the novel;²¹ in this instance, the suspect nature of the comment is highlighted by the fact that in the same breath the narrator laments that this pretty story has been lost to the world forever due to his lack of a pen and tablets to use in writing it down. This is Apuleius' buffoonery at its best; we are startled to discover that we were not really listening to the ass report this tale to us after all, but were fellow-listeners along with him; however, the solicitous ass, not willing to relinquish his role as narrator, lamely supposes for the moment that if only he had had writing materials, he would somehow have been able to grasp them in his hooves and take dictation. The passage illustrates the elements of surprise, mock-naïveté, and incongruity which are essential to Apuleius' wit, and which both here and in the prologue are combined in an appeal to the reader's sympathy and for his attention. We laugh as we are brought down from Olympus with a jolt. In his refusal to set up explicit guidelines to his tales, Apuleius allows Lucius to classify "Cupid and Psyche" with such widely disparate tales as the witchcraft story of Aristomenes (1.5-20) and the bedroom farce, "The Lover and the Tub" (9.5-7), both of which he calls *lepidae fabulae*. Lucius hopes that the reader will share his amusement at all such tales, but he himself never profits from them, even when (as is true of the tales of Aristomenes and Cupid and Psyche) they seem to imply morals which are applicable to him.²²

Even when Lucius does attempt to be more precise in categorizing the tales, his prefatory comments are of only minimal help to the reader. Thus, at the start of "The Wicked Stepmother Tale" (10.2-12) we are told to take off our comic slippers and to put on the tragic buskin. The story which follows does appear to set tragic events in motion: in the manner of the Hippolytus legend, a boy is unjustly

²¹ *bellam fabellam*, 6.25; R. Helm (*RE* 23, col. 1438) insists on taking the comment seriously, but contrast the attitude of J. Tatum, *TAPA* 100 (1969) 498 (in reference to "The Tale of Aristomenes"): "If we perceive nothing more than . . . a *lepida fabula* in this story, then we have grasped nothing more than Lucius himself." I note sadly Tatum's comment elsewhere (493) that he may be tending toward a "humorless" interpretation of Apuleius' tales.

²² See Tatum (above, note 21) 493-502 (on Aristomenes and Telyphron). It is particularly appropriate to Lucius' character that he draws no moral from "Psyche," which certainly recalls some of Lucius' past experiences and hints at his eventual salvation, though it is too much to say that it is an "allegory of Lucius' own adventures" (Tatum's phrase, 509) in any extended detail.

accused of raping his stepmother, while another accidentally takes poison intended for his brother. We are surprised, however, by a joyous ending, when the first boy is acquitted of the crime and the second is restored to his father from the dead.²³ An opposite surprise occurs at the end of "The Tale of the Baker's Wife" (9.14-31). Here Lucius tells us at the start that we must not miss out on a tale which will be "the best one of all—delightful, with all the trimmings." There follows a "frame-work story" of adultery, interrupted by two internal tales on a similar theme; the first of these secondary tales (9.17-21) ends with the escape of the lover, while the wronged husband remains undeceived; the second (9.24-25) ends more ominously if still ambiguously, as the husband and wife reach an uneasy temporary truce. In the "framework story," however, the adultery leads to disaster: the cuckold baker punishes his wife's lover and the enraged wife hires a witch to murder her husband; the closing note is one of nightmarish gloom. In Apuleius' masterly use of the grotesque, violence and tragedy can follow close on, or coexist with, fun and frivolity, and the author delights in surprising those who expect only a laugh. Metamorphosis is truly the reigning god in this novel, and its effect on us is enhanced by the narrator's seeming inability (or the author's own puckish refusal) to provide the reader in advance with precise roadsigns.

Now to be constantly confronted with a series of roadsigns which raise false expectations might be a bewildering rather than a comic experience if the author did not provide us with some clues as to the true state of affairs. Otherwise Apuleius, rather than his narrator, might be justifiably charged with simple blundering, or with lack of concern for exact literary classification. But in fact Lucius the ass implicitly warns the reader, time and again, that to say the least he is no expert on the subjects of literature or human nature; and in some cases the reader is depicted actually interrupting the narrative in order to call Lucius to task for a statement. In the prologue, as we saw, when

²³ Walsh (above, note 1) claims that "our author seems hardly to have known how his story was going to end when he launched it. . . ." (171). Both Walsh and B. E. Perry (above, note 3; e.g. 254) are unable to appreciate Apuleius' skillful use of misleading clues and surprise twists in plot. For a discussion of Apuleius' method of deceiving the reader with false expectations, see P. Junghanns, *Die Erzählungstechnik von Apuleius' Metamorphosen* . . . (Leipzig 1932), esp. 73-74.

it looks as though the narrator is about to begin his story without properly introducing himself, the reader calls him short with a question (*Quis ille?*), but is rewarded only by a reply in which the narrator manages to avoid mentioning either his name or his native city. In Book 9, when telling "The Tale of the Baker's Wife," Lucius carelessly omits any reference to how he, an ass, could have found out all about the machinations of his mistress; the reader interrupts him again: "Wait a minute, you clever ass—if you were tied up behind the bread-mill, how could you know about the goings-on of these women, which were done in secret, as you admit?" and the ass is forced to add a hasty explanation (9.30).²⁴ Again, in Book 10 Lucius is treated to the view of a lascivious mime in which actors depict the Judgment of Paris. He reacts indignantly (10.33) to the immorality of the lesson which the mime supposedly conveys; if, at the beginning of the world, says Lucius, the judge Paris preferred sexual gratification to any of the other treasures which the goddesses offered him, why should we wonder if judges now are so easily bought, or if various famous men—Palamedes, Ajax, or Socrates—were all unjustly condemned by the juries trying them? The juxtaposition of the names of these three famous Greeks was no doubt suggested to Apuleius by a reference in Plato's *Apology*, and Lucius' tirade here may stem from a guilty conscience resulting from his own earlier choice of Fotis as a lover (which proved as unfortunate a choice as that of Venus by Paris). Nevertheless, the connection between the Judgment of Paris and an Athenian jury's condemnation of Socrates is a tenuous one at best; such unenlightening drawing of analogies is the ass' way of parading his cleverness, and the dubious relevance of his outburst to its specific stimulus is all too obvious.²⁵ Apuleius is clearly aware of this and

²⁴ Cf. Plautus, *Captivi* 10–13 (Nixon's translation): "Now you take me? Very good! Bless my soul! that gentleman at the back says he does not. Let him step this way. In case there is no opportunity to take a seat, sir, you can take a stroll, seeing you insist on making an actor turn beggar." Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (New York 1940) 56: "How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, *that my mother was not a papist*. —Papist! You told me no such thing, Sir."

²⁵ See Carl Schlam, *TAPA* 101 (1970) 485–86; Plato, *Apology* 41B. The narrator's pride in his philosophical predilection is clear almost from the start of the novel; in 1.2 he boasts of his descent from "the famous Plutarch and his nephew Sextus the philosopher"; but even there the claim is deflated, for with disregard for geographical accuracy he places the Boeotian Plutarch in Thessaly. See also 2.3; 8.27 *fin*.

allows Lucius to sense dimly his own absurdity: "But I'm afraid that some of you will criticize the extent of my indignation and think, 'What is this? are we going to let this ass spout philosophy at us?'"²⁶ He then calls a retreat: "I'll get back to the point of my story where I left off."

Lucius' enthusiasm for learning is indomitable despite his frequent setbacks, and, though aware of his mental limitations and of the absurdity of his plight, he is not deterred from intellectual pre-tensions which can verge on the lofty. In a revealing aside soon after he has gone to work in the mill (9.13), Lucius reflects on what his experience as an ass has meant to him:

The only comfort which I could find in my wretched existence derived from my natural curiosity; for no one took note of my presence and they all spoke and acted freely in front of me. How true it was, what that noble old Greek author said! For when he was describing a man of the highest intelligence (*summae prudentiae*), he sang of how he attained the highest virtues through his wanderings among many countries and acquaintance with varied peoples. Yes, I gave thanks a thousand times for being an ass; for the ass, while he did not make me so very wise (*minus prudentem*), at least made me acquainted with many things (*multiscium*), through being concealed in his skin and experiencing varied fortunes.

This analogy between the wanderings of Odysseus and those of an ass is not rendered less absurd by Lucius' professed refusal to compare his own wisdom with that of Homer's hero. For in fact Lucius often prides himself on his "cleverness," or "wisdom," while inside the skin of the ass: it is the *prudens asinus* who is able to discern the truth about Charite and Tlepolemus (7.12), and who has just boasted again about his *prudencia* (9.11) only a few pages before the passage quoted above. Furthermore, the *curiositas* from which Lucius pretends to derive so much comfort²⁷ is, as the reader knows, actually one of Lucius' greatest

In 1.4, when he converses with two travellers on the road to Hypata, Lucius again gets carried away by his love for making far-fetched "analogies." In order to illustrate the existence of unexplained wonders, he first tells of his own difficulties in swallowing a piece of cheese, then describes a sword-swallower in Athens, and then an acrobatic boy who climbed up the sword—and in a final ingenious irrelevance, compares this sight to the serpent-entwined staff of the god of medicine.

²⁶ Cf. 6.26: "haec quidem inepta et prorsus asinina cogitatio. . . ."

²⁷ This is actually only one of a series of mutually contradictory claims in which

handicaps: under the control of curiosity he ignored repeated warnings about witchcraft and was changed into an ass when he tampered with magic.²⁸ The denouement of the novel will again call to our minds how poorly Lucius learns from his experiences, for the priest of Isis in Book 11.15 reminds Lucius that all his troubles derived from *curiositas*. Further, the priest adds pointedly that the divine *prudentia* of Isis (in implied contrast with Lucius' own folly) is the factor which will bring about his salvation.²⁹ In the context of our discussion, however, the point to note most carefully about Lucius' "confession" in 9.13 is that it immediately precedes the introduction to "The Tale of the Baker's Wife" which, as we saw (above, page 523), Lucius misleadingly claims as the most delightful of all his tales despite its surprise tragic denouement. Apuleius nowhere gives us a better clue as to how the reader should weigh the judgments passed on to him by the narrator; just for the moment, he lets Lucius inadvertently confess the truth to us: I, the much-travelled ass, have learned many things but am a bad interpreter of all of them; now listen to the most delightful tale of all. The veil is lifted only to be immediately dropped again, but the careful reader will sense that a surprise is in store in the ensuing tale.

III. THE NARRATIVE VOICE AND APULEIUS' DRAMATIC METHOD; ALTERATION OF TONE IN BOOK 11

Many of the effects described above can be well compared with those of a great modern satirical novel. In discussing Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Martin Price refers to

the self-consciousness that is constantly subverting the larger forms of the book itself—insisting upon it as a printed thing . . . calling attention to the artifice of fictional time or to the process of reading itself, or, most of all,

Lucius tries ironically to look on the bright side of his condition: in 3.24 he says that the only *solacium* of becoming an ass was the increased size of his sexual member, to serve Fotis; in 9.15 he cites his big *ears* as his *unicum solacium*.

²⁸ For a recent discussion of this theme see Carl Schlam, "The Curiosity of the Golden Ass," *CJ* 64 (1968) 120–25.

²⁹ Here I follow the reading of the MSS at 11.15.22; modern editors follow Colvius in emending *prudentia* to *providentia*, but cf. *De Deo Socratis* 15 (page 24.11–14 Thomas): "quippe tantum eos deos appellant, qui . . . iuste ac *prudenter* curriculo vitae gubernato . . . vulgo advertuntur;" *Asclepius* 34 (page 74.18–20 Thomas): "omnia enim deus et ab eo omnia et eius omnia voluntatis. quod totum est bonum decens et *prudens*. . . ." See also Hildebrand's arguments in defense of *prudentia* in his 1842 commentary *ad loc.*

to the author's exercise of control. . . . Sterne insists upon making us conscious of all we have commonly taken for granted. By pretending incompetence or indecision, by teasing us with false leads or cheating our logical expectations, he exposes the forms at every point.³⁰

Calling attention to normally accepted conventions; cheating the reader's logical expectations at every turn—these elements are essential to Apuleius' narrative method, as well as to Sterne's. Both authors, for example, borrow the comic dramatists' trick (of which ancient dramatists are so fond³¹) of temporarily shattering the dramatic mood by claiming to anticipate some interest or objection on the part of the audience. Because of his limited wit, an ass has to work harder than would a human narrator in holding the reader's attention; and Apuleius never lets us lose sight of his narrator's efforts to present his material in a manner acceptable to the reader. Thus, the narrator will self-consciously stress the absurdity of an ass as the author of a book (6.25.1-4), or the nuisance of having to translate the words of all of his Greek characters into Latin (1.1.10-12; 4.32.), or the task of whipping up his characters' *fabulae* into proper literary shape (6.29.6-8; 8.1.9-12). Like Sterne, Apuleius allows the reader to interrupt the story in order to point out logical inconsistencies (cf. above, note 24). His solicitous asides to the reader, ostensibly meant to guide him or hold his attention, instead lead him down blind alleys.³²

New and startling twists on convention are especially important in Apuleius' tales, which, because of their unexpected turns of plot, false clues, apparent inconsistencies, and surprise endings, are sometimes thought to be hastily constructed hybrids.³³ It is not sloppy writing, but deliberate use of misleading hints, which falsely raises the expectation that Telephron's mutilation will come about as a punishment for his dereliction in the duty of guarding a corpse (2.22), or which turns Charite from a modest, unassuming wife into a scheming virago (8.1-14), or which causes "The Tale of the Baker's Wife" to lose its

³⁰ Martin Price, *To the Palace of Wisdom* (Garden City, N.Y. 1965) 327.

³¹ E.g. Aristophanes, *Peace* 43-48; Plautus, *Poenulus* 550-52; and see above, p. 7 and note 12.

³² Cf. Sterne (above, note 24) 283: "So much for my chapter upon chapters, which I hold to be the best chapter in my whole work; and take my word, whoever reads it, is full as well employed, as in picking straws." Sterne's mocking statement of purpose (301-302) can be helpfully compared with Apuleius' prologue.

³³ Cf. Walsh (above, note 1) 153-54; 158, n. 2; 161; 201; and see above, note 23.

Milesian raciness and to end on a note of horror (9.30-31). Similarly, the reader is often surprised by the intrusion of parodies of standard dramatic devices, which embrace a variety of genres, so that we are treated to burlesques of stock declamations from tragedy and the Greek romance, and of themes from mythology,³⁴ all of which depend largely for their humor on their introduction at ludicrously inappropriate moments. In a novel of magical metamorphosis, nothing remains what it seems to be; and this factor of sudden change should be considered central to an explanation of the most unexpected surprise of all in the novel, the transformation of the *Metamorphoses* itself from a collection of anecdotes providing varied edification and entertainment into a fable about the journey of the soul through life. Such a transformation becomes possible through the sudden elevation of perspective in Book 11, when Lucius learns the meaning of his former life and chooses to turn away from that life.

In order to appreciate fully this leap in perspective in Book 11, the reader has to see how the limited perspective of the pre-Isis world in the novel is tied to the narrator's own humorously distorted and limited judgment. At the start of the novel, Lucius, a cloistered young scholar (cf. 2.10.5; 3.19.13-14) is poorly equipped to comprehend the dangers of his own misdirected adolescent emotions, nor is he skillful at comprehending the true motives of others toward him. Lucius is disconcerted by the forwardness of the well-meaning Byrrhaena, and rejects her good advice about staying away from Pamphile; he persists in fidelity to the miserly and self-serving Milo and, feeling the need for a protective and authoritative father-substitute, maintains a filial devotion to him even after Milo has been instrumental in betraying him to public humiliation in the Festival of Laughter.³⁵ Above all, Lucius goes beyond the bounds of all reason in his slavish infatuation with Fotis. Apuleius brilliantly reveals the ludicrousness and actual superficiality of this grand passion by causing Lucius to deliver an overblown

³⁴ Tragedy: Socrates' speech, 1.8.10-13; Romance: Aristomenes' speech to his bed, 1.16.4-8 (cf. Chaireas' speech in Chariton, "Chaireas and Callirrhoe" 5.6); Mythology: Odysseus, 9.13.13-20, and Pasiphae, 10.22.16-21. Further examples of parodies in Walsh (above, note 1) 52-60.

³⁵ Byrrhaena: 2.3.11-15; 2.6.1-5; Milo: 3.12.7-12, and cf. 7.3.1-7, where he still calls Milo "hospes mihi carissimus" and says that to murder him would have been akin to parricide.

sophistic encomium on the beauty of Fotis' hair, and on the nobility of hair in general (2.8-9). Surely in this passage, if anywhere, we feel the limitations of an outlook on life which can never see below the surface of people, and which never looks for anything in their discourses beyond banal titillation. At the end of Book 10, when Lucius breaks away from a circus and finds refuge in the soft bosom of the sand on the beach at Cenchreae—like Psyche's sleep in the flowers outside Cupid's palace—he is on the verge of discovering a new and receptive power that can free him from his former hostile world, a world which sought only to exploit him or to put him on display as a freak. But more importantly, Lucius is now ready to throw off his old asinine self and to discover a heavenly *voluptas* which will enable him, like Chaucer's Troilus after his death,³⁶ to laugh at his old life as he discovers how trivial are all the values he once considered important.

In Book 11 Lucius truly becomes a man, in a sense that goes far beyond the mere question of his external form. Apuleius suggests this widening of his theme by causing Lucius to lose sight of the limitations of the ass's perspective even before his actual retransformation. When Lucius attempts to describe Isis rising out of the sea, he expresses the fear that the *paupertas oris humani* may not be sufficient to convey her divine beauty (11.3.7-11): a remarkable aside, in sharp contrast to his usual joke about the absurdity of an *ass* attempting to treat weighty matters. The beginning of the subsequent description of Isis, which refers to her long, flowing hair, surprisingly echoes Lucius' earlier encomium on the beauty of Fotis' hair. This touch, whether deliberate or not, is psychologically profound: the suggestion of Fotis' beauty being present in the august deity indicates that Lucius' earlier misconceived attraction has been sublimated and transferred to a meaningful object—to the goddess who can benefit Lucius rather than lead him to disaster. We must remember also that both Fotis and Isis are associated with Venus (2.17; 11.2). What had been trivial and misguided in the case of Fotis is now used to enhance the awe inspired by the beauty of Isis; it is part of the change from sexual to spiritual *voluptas*. Later, in describing his initiation into the cult of Isis, Lucius warns the reader against the

³⁶ Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde* 5.1814-25. On *voluptas* in Apuleius, see H. Ebel (above, note 1) 169-72; cf. also *Met.* 11.24.22 (not included in Ebel's discussion) where *voluptas* is used of the joy Lucius feels at contemplating the image of Isis.

penalties of *temeraria curiositas* (11.23.22), thus serving notice that he himself has moved beyond his chronic enslavement to curiosity, and at the same time lightheartedly turning against the reader the same sort of joke which used to take Lucius himself as its butt. Lucius gradually sloughs off his faith in external appearances as he begins to realize the importance of a man's inner self; Apuleius slyly suggests this change when Lucius, who had earlier made a fetish of human hair, discovers that the tonsured priests of Isis by sacrificing their physical beauty have become *terrena sidera* who worship the unearthly beauty of the goddess (11.10). Lucius' own triple initiation into the cult will involve a similar sacrifice, first of the sexual *voluptas* for which he had come to strive so eagerly, and finally, of his own attractive head of hair (cf. 2.2.18-19) which he must shave off before becoming a priest of Osiris. In the very last sentence of the novel, Lucius reports that this symbolic sacrifice did not cause him any shame (as would have been true of his earlier self) but that he went about rejoicing and openly displaying his tonsured crown to all whom he saw.

The change which we have outlined in the narrator's perspective in Book 11, pervasive though it is in altering his personality and elevating the tone of the narrative, can help only in part to account for the unexpected switch in *personae* in 11.27, where the narrator is suddenly—and seemingly offhandedly—identified as *Madaurensis*, “the man from Madaura” (Apuleius' own birthplace in North Africa) rather than “from Corinth,” which is Lucius' home. Although some of the older commentators sought to emend this word³⁷ or dismissed it as a careless mistake on Apuleius' part,³⁸ a more recent tendency is to interpret it as a deliberate clue by the author that he has abandoned fiction for autobiography in at least some parts of Book 11.³⁹ Such an assumption may appear unavoidable to many readers but is not susceptible to final proof.⁴⁰ Moreover such a change of *personae*, if totally unprepared

³⁷ For *Madaurensis* Goldbacher substituted *mane Doriensem* (recorded in Helm's critical apparatus).

³⁸ See the commentaries of Oudendorp and Hildebrand *ad loc.*

³⁹ Typical comments are those of O. Schissel, *Die Griechische Novelle* (Halle 1913) 94; Morelli, *SIFC* 21 (1915) 94-111; Perry (above, note 3) 242.

⁴⁰ The supposed points of correspondence with known facts about the author are interesting, but not close enough to be really compelling. In 11.28 the narrator says that he has used up most of his patrimony due to travels and the high prices in Rome, and mentions pleading causes in the Roman forum; Apuleius himself was once a student

for, would seem to imply, as one critic has said, "a certain attitude of disinterest toward the reader and the rules of the genre."⁴¹ Is there an alternative way of making some sense of the reference in its context?

In 11.27 Lucius is warned by Isis that he has not yet completed all his required religious initiations; he then realizes that he has so far neglected consecration to Osiris, "the highest father of all the gods." He is subsequently visited in a dream by a certain Asinius Marcellus, a member of the college of *pastophores*, or priests of Osiris. Lucius is sure that the visitation has some special meaning for him, since Asinius' name, being close to the word *asinus*, seems to recall the beast into which Lucius was transformed. Sure enough, soon after awakening Lucius is visited by the priest in person, who informs him that he himself has had a dream matching Lucius' own. Some divinity (apparently Osiris, but there is a gap in the manuscript at this point) appeared to Asinius in a dream and informed him that a certain man would be sent to him the next day. In context, the man in question must be the narrator, i.e. Lucius, but it is not Lucius who is named:

nam sibi visus est quiete proxima, dum magno deo coronas exaptat . . . et de eius ore, quo singulorum fata dictat, audisse mitti sibi Madauremsem, sed admodum pauperem, cui statim sua sacra deberet ministrare; nam et illi [Madaurensi] studiorum gloriam et ipsi [Marcello] grande compendium sua comparari providentia.

The great god Osiris promises "the poor man from Madaura" that he will win great glory for his studies, thanks to the *providentia* of the god. This is the first we have heard of Madaura in the novel, and if we did not already know that Apuleius came from there the point of the reference would be lost on us entirely; moreover this sudden intrusion of the author does not seem more than a momentary break in the stride of the narrative. True, the narrator is never named again in the closing chapters of the novel after the conclusion of the prophecy (which might seem to leave open the possibility that he has by then been "transformed" into Apuleius himself), but he has pointedly reminded us just previously that he was once transformed into an ass, as if

in Rome (*Florida* 17; page 31 Helm), was initiated into religious mysteries in Greece (*Apologia* 55; page 62 Helm), and used up his patrimony through "travels, studies, and liberality" (*Apologia* 23; page 27 Helm).

⁴¹ P. Veyne, "Apulée à Cenchrées," *RPh* 39 (1965) 241-242.

Apuleius wanted to emphasize paradoxically that the dramatic convention is still being observed even here where it would appear to be broken. Now note that, while Asinius and the narrator both understand at once that the prophecy refers to Lucius, it is Osiris, not either of the men, who calls Lucius "the poor man from Madaura." Despite the apparent casualness of the reference, it comes in a passage which gives it a special emphasis: a prophecy attributed to the great Osiris himself, and relating to the narrator, is naturally of great importance and interest to the reader. But Osiris has the special prerogative of divinity: his prophecy is likely to see further than his human listeners can comprehend, and may have a secret meaning unknown to anyone in the story. The failure of Asinius and Lucius to express bafflement at the (to them) unintelligible *Madaurenses* is puzzling, and compounds the obscurity of the passage for us; they behave, in fact, as though they did not hear the word at all. For whatever reason, the author is refusing to guide us further here, so that his readers, rather than his fictional characters, are forced to assume the role of prophetic interpreters. In Osiris' prophecy the emphasis is on the glory and honor to be received through Isis and Osiris; we cannot know what connection with these divinities Apuleius may have had in real life, but at the very least he seems to be saying here, "this honor in the eyes of the gods is one which I am proud to assume for myself." It may be objected, of course, that Apuleius could have chosen a much simpler and clearer method of associating himself with the favor of Osiris. For example, he could have caused the dream of Asinius Marcellus to refer to "the man from Madaura" as a third person (unrelated to Lucius) to whom the god was also showing favor. As it is, by momentarily "becoming" the narrator he has taken the risk of confusing the reader rather than edifying him. Yet the problem may be less than it seems, if we consider an earlier prophecy in the novel which helps put the vision of Osiris in a better perspective.

While staying at the house of Milo, Lucius describes to his host how he was once told by Diophanes, a Chaldean prophet, that he would be immortalized in literature: *mihi denique proventum huius peregrinationis inquirenti multa respondit et oppido mira et satis varia; nunc enim gloriam satis floridam, nunc historiam magnam et incredulam fabulam et libros me futurum* (2.12.12-16). Diophanes' prophecy is clearly a tongue-in-

cheek reference to the *Metamorphoses* itself: the *libri* which will record Lucius' adventures are the eleven books which make up the novel as we have it. But having recorded this half-humorous prophecy, Apuleius at once implies a doubt that it will ever be fulfilled. Milo recalls an anecdote in which Lucius' Chaldean prophet was exposed as a mercenary fraud. It seems that on a voyage across the narrow strait of water between Euboea and Thessaly Diophanes suffered a disastrous shipwreck, and moreover was robbed by pirates. His fate vividly demonstrates his inability to prophesy a successful voyage for himself, let alone for others; he could not overcome the fickleness of *saeva fortuna*. The irony of this scene is unusually complex. On the one hand, of course, the Chaldean's prophecy is destined to come true: Lucius' adventures will be the subject of a book, namely the *Metamorphoses* itself. But the *gloriam satis floridam* which he will gain through such immortalization is not what he expects. At the start of Book 3, when Lucius is anticipating arrest for the "murder" of the wineskins, he notes with chagrin that Diophanes has tricked him; his stay in Hypata is destined to win him disgrace and ridicule rather than glory (3.1.11-12). Later, after he has been seized by the magistrates and is being led forward to be put on display at the mock trial in the Festival of Laughter, Lucius is amazed to note that the spectators are all doubled over with laughter at his plight: *obliquato tamen aspectu rem admirationis conspicio: nam inter tot milia populi circumsecus vadentis nemo prorsum, qui non risu dirumperetur, aderat* (3.2.9-12). This hilarious reaction of the crowd to the ridiculous situation in which Lucius finds himself typifies the "glory" which he, a fictitious character, is to win as the hero of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*. Diophanes, the quack prophet, had predicted that Lucius' adventures would be the material for an *incredundam fabulam*, "a fantastic story," but Lucius had hoped that he would be the valorous hero of such a story, not a comic character who is changed into an ass. Diophanes himself was unable to overcome the force of powerful *fortuna*, and he and his prophecies are not to be taken very seriously, any more than is Lucius of Corinth, the unfortunate ass, who is himself buffeted about by fortune until his rescue by the gods.

The discrediting of Diophanes gives an added importance to the prophecy of Osiris in Book 11. While Apuleius always dissociates himself from Lucius, the comic character, in Osiris' prophecy he

momentarily identifies with (by the extreme method of seeming to *become*) Lucius, the recipient of the glory of Isis and Osiris. The prophecy of Diophanes, predicting the eternal glory of Apuleius' novel, is trivial and untrustworthy at best; the prophecy of Osiris, predicting the eternal glory bestowed by the gods, must be believed. For unlike the classical Roman poets,⁴² Apuleius (at least in the *Metamorphoses*) is unable to take himself seriously enough to make an eloquent claim that his literary monument will win him immortality. His attitude toward literary fame, as suggested by the Diophanes-scene, is self-effacing to a degree which, on the strength of his minor writings alone, we should hardly have guessed that Apuleius could attain. But in dealing with Isis and Osiris, Apuleius discards the irony with which he views his novel. To demonstrate the depth of his emotional commitment to these powerful deities, the author takes the unusual step of intruding personally into his narrative, in order to testify that the glory of acceptance by Isis and Osiris is what matters most to him.⁴³

⁴² Notably Horace, *Carm.* 3.30 and Ovid, *Met.* 15.871-872.

⁴³ I am indebted to professors Thomas Cole of Yale University and Harvey Klevar of Luther College for helpful suggestions in the preparation of successive versions of this paper. In part it derives from my dissertation, *Lucius of Corinth and Apuleius of Madaura* . . . (Yale 1968).